



**Maroon Bells – Snowmass Wilderness  
Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan  
Draft Environmental Assessment**

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

**Q. Did the proposed plan change based off of public input received during the scoping period?**

- A. No substantial changes were made. Most comments were in support of providing enhanced management actions aimed at reducing natural resource impacts resulting from overnight use. However, small refinements and clarifications to the plan were done to address issues related to; displacement of visitors, dogs, human waste and human impacts in general. The public identified concerns were addressed in the adaptive management plan with a suite of management tools and monitoring.

**Q. What did the analysis show about the proposed plan?**

- A. The Environmental Assessment revealed the Proposed Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan's goal to reduce biophysical impacts related to camping would not have significant negative impacts to resources and would likely provide long term benefits to natural resource values (Aquatics, Fisheries, Cultural, Wildlife, Botany, Soils, Hydrology, Wilderness, etc.).

**Q. The analysis revealed that 5 zones are already exceeding capacity, how soon would a permit be implemented in those zones?**

- A. The Deciding Official will consider implementation methods and timing of an overnight permit system based on numerous factors, feasibility and technical logistics. A limited use camping permit system could be implemented in phases starting with zones that are already exceeding the overnight capacity. The soonest date that might be possible would be summer of 2018.

**Q. Will this proposed Plan implement an overnight permit system? Will there be a fee?**

- A. Yes, the plan proposes an overnight permit system for zones that exceed overnight Groups At One Time (GAOT) capacity. Only those zones that have exceeded that capacity would move to a permit system. A permit system could be applied in the future to other zones if and when they exceed their prescribed capacity.

The following is a brief description of some, but not all, of the tools and methods the Forest Service could utilize to implement a limited use camping permit:

- Utilize Recreation.gov to issue reservations for limited campsites through the National Recreation Reservation Service, similar to some Forest Service campgrounds. Recreation.gov charges a reservation fee which does not come back to the site for management, the fee stays with Recreation.gov as an administrative/processing fee. Execution of a reservation service fee does not require any Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) process.
- Execute an overnight limited use camping permit fee as a Special Recreation Permit under authority of FLREA which would result in revenue available for on-site program management. This would require a separate public participation process, documentation of responses, and regional and national reviews throughout the process.



- Manage allocation and issue permits out of local Forest Service or partner offices for no charge.

**Q. What are the next steps and how do I get involved?**

**A.** The release of the draft Environmental Assessment initiated a 30 day public comment period. The public is invited to submit timely and relevant comments about the proposed plan and the draft Environmental Assessment through April 28. This comment period is the final official time period for members of the public and relevant stakeholders to submit a comment and have standing for objections. There will be two more public meetings during this public comment period:

- **April 5, Rocky Mountain Institute, 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.**  
22830 Two Rivers Rd. Basalt CO, 81621
- **April 6, Gunnison Community Center, 4 p.m. – 6 p.m.**  
200 E. Spencer Avenue Gunnison, Colorado, 81230

The White River will take into consideration comments from this comment period and make changes to the proposed plan or Draft Environmental Assessment if they are pertinent. The Forest expects a Decision on the proposed Plan to come out sometime in mid-May. Baring objections, implementation of the plan could begin as early as summer 2018.

**Q. Why do we need a Visitor Use Management Plan?**

**A.** The plan will provide management direction for overnight camping which will adaptively address increasing natural resource degradation within the Maroon Bells Snowmass Wilderness. The proposed plan will enable managers to be flexible and assess specific areas within the Wilderness and address resource concerns with appropriate management actions. The plan seeks to balance the preservation of natural conditions by addressing biophysical impacts resulting from overnight use, while continuing to provide opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities.

**Q. What kind of degradation is happening in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness?**

**A.** Increasing overnight visitor use within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness has been documented as a management concern since 1986. Within certain locations (*Conundrum Hot Springs, Crater Lake and the 4 Pass Loop*) and high use travel corridors, use has increased up to 285% from 2006 to 2015. Degradation to the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness physical resource includes disturbance of wildlife, habituated wildlife to human trash and campsites, illegal tree cutting coupled with fire scars, trash, human waste, campsite hardening and proliferation. Additionally there are social impacts occurring on the landscape to opportunities for solitude, lack of Wilderness and camping ethics, crowding, noise and overcrowding in parking areas and increased need for emergency closures.

**Q. How long has the Forest Service been monitoring the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness?**

**A.** Increasing visitor use within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness has been documented as a management concern since the 1986 White River National Forest Land and Resource Management



Plan (LRMP) and was addressed in the 2002 LRMP revision. The Forest has been monitoring and collecting wilderness data for decades. Wilderness data has been obtained through campsite inventories, required overnight registrations, and through wilderness ranger patrol logs.

**Q. Does the proposed Plan apply to day use of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness?**

**A.** No. This proposed plan will only address overnight use of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. While this OVUM plan does not specifically address or propose management direction for day use, monitoring data can be used to help inform future planning decisions and analysis related to day use social, physical and administrative issues and concerns that are not included in this plan.

**Q. Does the proposed Plan apply to the whole wilderness area or just specific areas?**

**A.** This plan applies to the entire Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. However, the Wilderness has been divided into zones based on visitor patterns and trends as well as landscape features.

**Q. How did the Forest Service determine the overnight zones?**

**A.** As part of the planning process a study was completed that defined the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness physical capacity for overnight visitors. The overnight visitor capacity study took into consideration visitor use patterns and trends related to overnight use and the entire Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness was zoned so as to better define each zone's capacity for overnight use. The plan incorporated current LRMP desired conditions, standards and guidelines into measurable indicators and thresholds for overnight camping zones.

Current Land and Resource Management Plan wilderness direction is based on group encounters (referred to as "parties encountered"). Therefore, the addition of a new indicator to monitor overnight "Groups At One Time" (GAOT) per camping zone was needed in order to specifically address and manage the biophysical impacts in the zones.

**Q. How did the Forest Service determine thresholds for the camping zones?**

**A.** The GAOT indicator (assumes 1 group occupies one campsite, average groups size is 2.3) and associated thresholds (number of campsites) for overnight use in each management area is supported by years of Aspen-Sopris District monitoring and campsite inventory data. More simply stated, each zone has a defined number of campsites (capacity determination) that meets forest plan direction. Annual monitoring will be done through the existing required overnight registration system which monitors numbers of groups that are overnight camping. Annual monitoring will inform whether or not a zone is exceeding the capacity (GAOT) and forest plan desired conditions (prescribed setting conditions for Pristine, Primitive, Semi-Primitive, group encounters, etc.).

The GAOT is the primary indicator, the first and most sensitive trigger for additional, potential management tools like a permit system. Once the threshold is exceeded within a zone, that zone would require an appropriate management action. The plan utilizes an adaptive management strategy, so only those zones that exceed thresholds would have a management actions triggered and implemented.



**Q. What is adaptive management and how is it being used in the context of this proposal?**

**A.** Adaptive management focuses on learning and adapting, through partnerships of managers, and other stakeholders who learn together how to create and maintain sustainable resource systems. In the context of this proposed plan, an adaptive strategy defines desired conditions with indicators and threshold standards. When thresholds are exceeded for an indicator, management actions are triggered to achieve compliance. These triggered actions are phased in so that the least intensive intervention that achieves the desired conditions is utilized (minimum tool concept). The adaptive management strategy will allow for long-term monitoring of physical displacement and implement a permit system if the capacity is exceeded for any zone in Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness.

**Q. What is the ultimate goal of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan?**

**A.** The proposed plan seeks to provide long-term direction and flexibility in management focused on reducing biophysical impacts from overnight visitor use in accordance with the Wilderness Act and the White River and Gunnison National Forests, Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP's) thereby; preserving wilderness character of the Maroon Bells- Snowmass Wilderness by sustaining its natural and undeveloped qualities.

**Q. How will the Forest Service enforce this plan?**

**A.** If the proposed plan is adopted, the Forest Service will work with, wilderness rangers, volunteers and partner organizations to implement the plan as well as Forest Service Law Enforcement, Forest Service Protection Officers.

**Q. What benefit would this plan provide to the recreational experience?**

**A.** Having the ability to address these bio-physical concerns, would improve both the biophysical environment (natural and undeveloped) and social values qualities within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. This would enhance opportunities for high quality wilderness experiences for future visitors. Specifically the proposed plan would provide managers long-term management tools to directly address the resource degradation occurring on the landscape including; human waste, illegal fires, wildlife habituation and illegal camping.

